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SUBJECT: TURKISH PRESIDENT GUL'S JANUARY VISIT TO WASHINGTON

Classified By: AMBASSADOR ROSS WILSON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (SBU) Abdullah Gul is Turkey's first president to visit Washington since 1999. He took office in August following a sharp confrontation between the government and military in April and an overwhelming Justice and Development Party (AKP) victory in parliamentary elections in July. Gul's move from the foreign ministry to the presidency was the proximate result of the AKP's decision to stand up to military interference, though it also left very much unresolved the secular-Islamist and other key political and social divides that linger across the country's landscape.

12. (SBU) Leveraging years of experience as foreign minister and a brief stint as prime minister, Gul has set out to raise Turkey's regional and international profile where his predecessor, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, did little. Gul has already traveled to Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan (with two planeloads of businessmen), Georgia and the Council of Europe. He has hosted a number of foreign leaders in Ankara as well.

13. (C) Gul wants a substantive visit that gives impetus to US-Turkish ties and leaves a mark on our relationship. He aims to highlight US-Turkish collaboration on key issues) Iraq, Iran, the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans, Afghanistan/Pakistan, energy and terrorism) to show we are working together on behalf of peace, freedom and prosperity in the region and the world.

Iraq/PKK

14. (C) On Iraq and the PKK, Gul understands the stakes. He put behind him the March 2003 dissonance over a northern invasion through Turkey (when he was prime minister) and worked effectively with us as foreign minister for a stable, united Iraq. A fall 2005 push for Sunni inclusion brought VP Hashemi and others into Iraqi politics and the government itself the following year. Gul was critical to standing up the expanded neighbors process. As we continue the enhanced intelligence sharing that has informed recent cross-border strikes on PKK targets in northern Iraq, Gul is key to getting the political process with Iraq moving via an invitation to President Talabani. Gul understands the need to deal with the KRG, calibrate the mix of kinetic and political actions so the PKK is hurt but Iraq isn't, and spoke eloquently at his inaugural on behalf of equal rights and diversity to bring Kurds and other disaffected minorities into the mainstream. He was received like a hero on a visit to the largely Kurdish southeast days later.

Iran

15. (C) Turkey opposes a nuclear-armed Iran and recognizes its negative impact on the regional balance of power. As foreign minister, Gul engaged strongly in support of P5 1 efforts to persuade Iran to take the necessary steps to regain trust, urging the Iranians to cooperate fully with the IAEA and take up our June 2006 offer. Gul also pressed Tehran to release eight Americans detained in Iran earlier this year.

16. (C) However, Turkey has shied away from a tough public stance, preferring diplomacy and soft power to influence Iranian behavior. It depends on Iran for 15% of its natural gas (the only alternative to Russia), relies on Iran as its trade route to landlocked Central Asia, and believes the one million Iranian tourists who visit annually are a long-term force for change.

Middle East

17. (C) Gul has cultivated relationships throughout the Middle East as foreign minister and president. He hosted Shimon Peres and Abu Mazan in an unprecedented joint Israeli-Palestinian visit in November. Turkish FM Babacan was helpful at Annapolis. The 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war was extremely unpopular, but Turkey received 2000 American evacuees, joined the expanded UNIFIL force, and has backed PM Siniora. Saudi King Abdullah, Syrian President Asad and Jordan's King Abdullah are among other recent visitors, and Gul travels to Egypt in mid-January. Turkey used its relationship with Damascus to intercede on behalf of Israeli hostages and, according to the Israelis, has remained

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helpful in passing messages to Syria; Turks believe Asad is a moderate, and they want to hive Syria off from Iran. Nominally in an unofficial, AKP capacity, Gul met with HAMAS leader Khalid Mishal in Ankara in February 2006, having first argued internally against the visit. He told us afterwards that he was very tough on the need to abandon terrorism.

The Caucasus

18. (C) Turkey's work with us for peace and regional cooperation in the Caucasus is crippled by an estranged relationship with Armenia. Turkey closed the land border in 1993 due to the Armenian occupation of Azeri territories during the Nagorno-Karabakh (N-K) war. Gul personally has reached out to his Armenian counterpart, but has been dismayed by Yerevan's support for genocide recognition in foreign parliaments, including the U.S. Congress. Energy and ethnic ties with Azerbaijan and deep concern about Georgia's future in the face of Russian intimidation led Gul to visit Baku and Tbilisi in recent months. We are stressing the normalization of ties with Yerevan to unlock more effective Turkish diplomacy on Caucasus regional issues and to change the genocide resolution's political prospects in the US.

Balkans and Kosovo

19. (SBU) Turkey regards the Balkans as a former imperial backyard and believes it has a constructive role to play. It has supplied peacekeepers in Bosnia and Kosovo. Gul told recent Congressional visitors that he views Kosovo independence as inevitable, but wants to avoid instability. In practice, Turkey will not be among the first to recognize Pristina, but wants to stay in sync with the US and EU and will join the consensus that emerges.

Afghanistan/Pakistan

10. (C) Turkey has been a leader in Afghanistan, commanding ISAF twice, heading Greater Kabul security throughout most of 2007, and running a successful PRT in Wardak. A five-year, \$100 million aid program is nearing completion. As foreign

minister, Gul visited Afghanistan and Pakistan this year, and he returned to Islamabad just weeks ago. Turkey parlayed historically close relations with both countries into an Ankara Declaration⁸ signed by Gul's predecessor, Karzai and Musharraf in April. It commits the two sides to cooperate against terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking; intelligence sharing and denial of terrorist training and sanctuary; confidence building through civil society and cultural exchanges; and the orderly repatriation of refugees.

A joint working group monitors implementation of these commitments. A Turkish business association is pursuing development of an industrial zone in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region.

¶11. (C) Gul's early December visit to Islamabad included a call on President Musharraf and carefully staged meetings with Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif. He urged the opposition to learn from Turkey's checkered history with democracy and stay in the political game. Turkey hopes to host another trilateral summit in Istanbul soon after the Pakistani elections.

Energy

¶12. (C) Our countries have worked together successfully since the mid-1990s to develop Caspian energy resources and the infrastructure to bring them directly to international markets in the West. Now the focus is on gas. Turkey and European energy security depends on accessing Caspian, and potentially Iraqi, gas. Turkish and US leadership is needed to draw Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan away from overdependence on Russia and to resolve intergovernmental and commercial problems, and Gul's talks in Baku, Almaty and Ashgabat have addressed this. However, Turkey has been reluctant to act as a regional broker and hopes Caspian resources will help meet its own domestic energy shortages. Two US-Turkey-Iraq gas working group meetings have laid the basis for collaboration, but Iraqi participation is stymied by still pending hydrocarbon legislation.

¶13. (SBU) The Turkish parliament passed a nuclear energy law in November to facilitate the commercial development of

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nuclear power. Tenders for the first of nine plants are scheduled to be issued in March. Our bilateral nuclear energy agreement with Turkey is at the White House awaiting approval for submission to Congress. It will enable US firms to participate in Turkey's nuclear power development and bolster our nonproliferation agenda here. The agreement was delayed for several years after signing due to connections of private entities within Turkey to the AQ Khan network. Criminal cases against the relevant entities are on-going.

Other

¶14. (SBU) Terrorism: An al-Qaeda victim in November 2003 and subsequently, Turkey has cooperated closely with us and others against the organization. As deputy prime minister and head of Turkey's Counter-terrorism Board, Gul played a crucial role in this.

¶15. (C) Cyprus: Gul was a key protagonist in Turkey's one step ahead⁸ Cyprus diplomacy in 2003-2004, and he remains deeply frustrated by the Greek Cypriots' 2004 rejection of the Annan plan. In early 2006, he authored a plan to trade small progress in Turkey's relations with the Greek Cypriots for an easing of Turkish Cypriot isolation; the plan went nowhere. In a September 2007 visit as president to the island, Gul came close to backing the idea of full-fledged separation of the two states, but a negotiated, bi-communal, bi-zonal federation remains Turkey's stated goal.

¶16. (SBU) EU: Gul's inaugural address as president dealt at length with EU accession as a goal and orienting principle of Turkish reform. Lagging government action on the EU agenda

is matched by sagging public support and, for different reasons, hostility in France, Austria and elsewhere in Europe.

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